

# WLCI Update

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## WLCI Mission

Conduct a long-term science-based program to assess and enhance the quality and quantity of aquatic and terrestrial habitats at a landscape scale in southwest Wyoming, based on community partnerships and facilitation of responsible development.

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## Contact Info

Daily management and operation of the WLCI is based out of the BLM Rock Springs Field Office. If you are interested in working with the WLCI or have comments, please contact the office listed below. The feedback form on the WLCI website, located at [www.wlci.gov/contactus.htm](http://www.wlci.gov/contactus.htm) also allows for submission of comments.

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## Change in Executives

John Linn, Sublette County commissioner and representative of county commissions in the WLCI area, was installed as the new chair of the WLCI Executive Committee at the March 10 Executive Committee meeting. Linn served for a year as the 1<sup>st</sup> vice chair prior to taking on the position of chair.



*WLCI Executive Committee at its March 2009 meeting. From left, Steve Ferrell, Mary Thoman, John Etchepare, John Linn, Brian Kelly, and Don Simpson. Not pictured, Sharon Kyhl and Max Ethridge. (WDA)*

At the meeting, Brian Kelly, Wyoming field supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, became the 1st vice chair, and Steve Ferrell, director of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, was elected 2nd vice chair. The committee leadership positions represent local, state and federal committee membership, and change annually. The 1st vice chair is the chair-elect and the 2nd vice chair is the 1st vice chair-elect. John Etchepare, retired director of the Wyoming Department of Agriculture, previously held the chair position.

## Building Partnerships

At the March 10 Executive Committee meeting, state and local WLCI partners signed an agreement with the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of Wyoming that will allow private contributions to the WLCI to be received and managed. Contributions can be made to the foundation, with instructions that the funds should be used for the WLCI. Additional information about how to contribute to the WLCI will be available soon at [www.wlci.gov](http://www.wlci.gov). More information about the foundation is available at <http://www.whfw.org/>.

The March Executive Committee meeting included outreach to potential partners, with a reception, posters and presentations the evening of March 9. At the  
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*Steve Ferrell, Mary Thoman, and Pat Aullman, staff member of Rep. Cynthia Lummis, mingle at the March 9 WLCI outreach event. (WDA)*



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March 10 meeting, the Executive Committee discussed the role industry and non-governmental organizations should have with the WLCI. The committee also received input from groups represented at the meeting to better understand the roles potential partners want with the WLCI. Some potential roles include information sharing, financial support, and project development. Continued work is needed to contact additional groups with operations in the WLCI area and to help all interested parties participate with the WLCI.

## Science Workshop

A range of science in and affecting southwest Wyoming was presented at the WLCI Science and Management Workshop in Laramie, Wyoming, May 12-14. The workshop addressed scientific findings that have yielded efficient management actions in the WLCI area and highlighted scientific and management activities since the preceding WLCI science workshop in May 2007.

The workshop focused on work done by the USGS to implement the agency's Science Strategy for the WLCI, but also included science work being conducted in southwest Wyoming that may complement that effort. Many organizations conduct science in southwest Wyoming, and the workshop provided an opportunity to hear from them about their activities. The WLCI Science and Technical Advisory

Committee (STAC) will use the information from the workshop to assess the status of WLCI science and make recommendations for any changes or additions to science-related work that may be needed.

In addition to the science presentations, some of the background presentations explained the need for the WLCI program. For example, John Linn, WLCI Executive Committee chair and Sublette County commissioner, explained the importance of the southwest Wyoming landscape since he comes from multiple generations in the area. He expressed the need to think and act for the long term by recognizing the need for gas development, the positive contributions of agriculture, and protecting the area where he feels privileged to live.

A total of 45 presentations were made during eight plenary sessions covering the topics of WLCI Background and Overview, Foundations for Science-Based Conservation, Mapping and Modeling for Decision Making, Data and Information Management, Fish and Wildlife Research, Changing Landscapes, Monitoring, and Science Associated with Reclamation and Off-Site Mitigation. In addition, approximately 20 posters provided additional information about ongoing science work in the WLCI area. Two evening socials were held to provide time to look at the



*Participants view posters at the May 2009 WLCI Science and Management Workshop. (USGS)*

posters and to interact with other workshop participants.

The final day included breakout sessions on the topics of fish and wildlife research, monitoring and reclamation, as well as a demonstration session on data access. The breakouts were structured, with focused questions on what participants believed to be the future science and technology needs and how to better integrate science and on-the-ground conservation work. Information from the breakout sessions will be used to identify areas that need additional focus so the WLCI can be more effective.

The USGS and STAC sponsored the workshop, and the Ruckelshaus Institute provided facilitation support and will compile notes to help create a proceedings document. The oral presentations, posters, submitted papers, and major items of discussion during breakout groups will be provided in the published proceedings document. Many of these materials are also posted on the [www.wlci.gov](http://www.wlci.gov) Web site.



*Jessica Montag, USGS, presents information on a social science study at the May 2009 WLCI Science and Management Workshop. (USGS)*



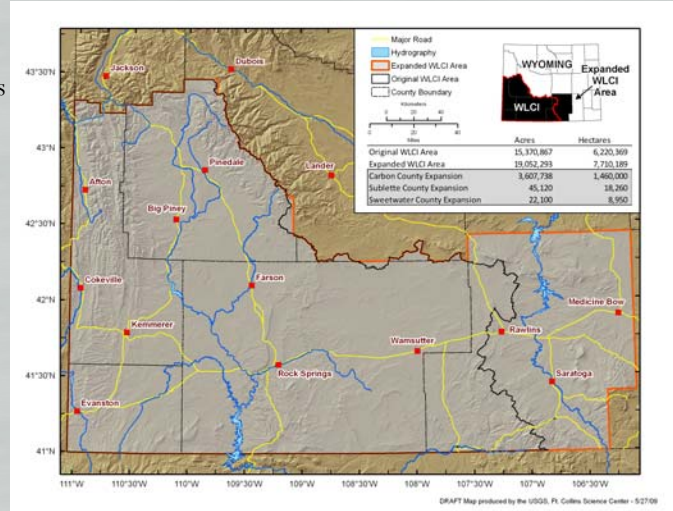
## Expansion of WLCI Boundaries

The WLCI Executive Committee decided to expand the WLCI borders at its May 15 meeting. The change accommodates the interest expressed by conservation districts and allows for additional opportunities to address the demand for wind power development in south-central Wyoming.

The Executive Committee voted unanimously to incorporate all portions of Carbon, Sweetwater and Sublette counties into the WLCI boundaries. Previously, about one-quarter of Carbon County and most of Sweetwater and Sublette counties were included in the boundaries, which had followed the Continental Divide.

The new boundaries will allow the WLCI to work with the Medicine Bow Conservation District, which had expressed interest in working with the WLCI. The Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins Conservation District also wanted the boundaries expanded since it views the WLCI's work positively and only a small portion of the conservation district occurred in the WLCI area previously. The change brings in additional areas targeted for wind power development that have not otherwise experienced development pressure.

The new boundaries for the WLCI are defined as all of Carbon, Lincoln, Sublette, Sweetwater and Uinta counties, as well as portions of Fremont County in the Green River and Great Divide basins. Within this area, the WLCI continues to focus on sagebrush, mountain shrub, aspen, aquatic and riparian communities at the landscape scale.



## LPDTs at Work

Local Project Development Teams (LPDTs) provided priorities for 2010 projects at meetings this spring. Each LPDT prioritized proposed projects in their area based on what technical merits individual members considered most important, such as biological importance, connectivity and likelihood for project success. The prioritizations will provide a factor in the ranking criteria, with the top LPDT priority receiving an extra 30 out of 200 points and each of the top five priorities receiving additional points.

LPDT meetings also were held in February to discuss future projects and receive presentations about each proposal. Future meetings will include opportunities to tour projects, assess project effectiveness, develop new projects, and determine the future focus for types of

work and specific geographic areas of interest.

The LPDTs are organized along 8 digit Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) watersheds, although there is some flexibility in these boundaries. The teams include local biologists, range managers, conservation districts, landowners and multiple other interested parties. New participants are welcome at meetings.



*Participants at the February 2009 Local Project Development Team meeting in Pinedale. (WDA)*

## 2009 Budget

The WLCI continued to receive Federal agency funding in 2009. The Bureau of Land Management received 1.4 million dollars, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service received \$1.5 million, and U.S. Geological Survey received \$750,000 for fiscal year 2009. USGS funding was cut in half from 2008 levels during the congressional appropriations process, but is projected to have restored budgets in 2010. BLM funding is used to conduct on-the-ground conservation projects. FWS funding funds private lands projects and provides capacity to protect at-risk fish and wildlife species. USGS funding supports the agency's scientific contributions to the WLCI. In addition to Federal funds, the state and local WLCI partners signed an MOU with the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of Wyoming to handle any private contributions to the WLCI.

## Term Easements/Leases

The WLCI Executive Committee has had discussions during its last several meetings about the types of conservation easements and conservation leases it will support. The committee wants to proceed cautiously as it ensures that an easement or lease really is providing the intended conservation benefit and determines which entity is most appropriate to hold an easement.

In many cases, conservation groups promote perpetual conservation easements because they restrict development permanently. Compared with perpetual easements, the term easement has a shelf life so that the landowner is not locked into property restrictions that may not make sense in the future. John Linn, WLCI Executive Committee chair, notes that a lot of ranches have not been interested in perpetual easements because of this permanent restriction, and he thinks more would be interested in term easements. Additionally, he believes more temporary tools provide an innovative approach to conserve the resources on the land while more effectively supporting family-based agriculture.

If the goal is conservation, a term easement or lease can provide temporary conservation benefits that allow additional time to determine the effects of certain development activities. Meantime, these tools provide compensation to the landowner for not developing the land, which can provide a conservation benefit when done correctly. In some cases, this financial compensation can help landowners stay profitable as they determine a good business approach for handling ongoing operations as well as future development opportunities. This can provide a positive benefit to wildlife, preserve open space and keep development at a reasonable level across the landscape. For example, in areas considered for wind development, a lease could delay development until its effects are better understood.

The WLCI will consider projects with easements on a case-by-case basis, based on the benefits provided. The Executive Committee also has determined that WLCI funding generally should not provide the majority of the funding, but may help complete committed funding for the easement or lease that is proposed. The Executive Committee also will consider easements more favorably if public access is included. WLCI projects for 2010 will have strict criteria for easements and must have a management strategy to ensure conservation benefits occur. The WLCI will continue to explore use of tools such as term conservation easements and leases for achieving conservation on the landscape.

## Catching Up to Wind Development

Southwest Wyoming has received a significant amount of interest by wind energy developers over the last couple of years, and the WLCI is looking at ways to handle the amount of potential development while ensuring the overall landscape function remains.

The American Wind Energy Association found there were 13 existing wind energy projects across Wyoming as of March 31, 2008. In contrast, the Bureau of Land Management had 30 authorized and 56 pending wind development applications on lands the agency administers in Wyoming as of March 6, 2009. Of these 86 applications, 68 are located within the WLCI area.

Developments include the installation of a meteorological (met) tower prior to development to evaluate a site's wind and other climactic conditions. Full development includes wind turbines, transmission lines to carry electricity, and roads to allow for servicing facilities. All of these elements create changes to the landscape that can affect wildlife, scenic values, and other items of concern. In many cases, data are not available to fully understand the effects of these changes. When considered across the landscape, extensive wind development has the potential to bring significant effects to wildlife species, such as bats and birds, while eliminating the sense of remoteness that can be experienced in many areas.

Discussions have been raised at the WLCI Executive Committee meetings about how the program can be involved with the issue of wind development. A short discussion at the May 2009 Executive Committee meeting included the topic of how to use leases to delay wind development while we gain a better understanding of potential effects. Additionally, part of the rationale for expanding the WLCI boundaries at the May 2009 meeting was to address wind development in areas that would not be targeted for other forms of energy development.

The WLCI does not have solutions to issues like wind, but will continue to look at this issue since it will likely play an important role on the landscape in the future.